

NEW BOOKS.

The recent publication (by Mr. Murray) of the treatise by Mr. Charles Darwin, in two volumes, on *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, was referred to in our biographical memoir of Mr. Darwin which accompanied an Engraving of his portrait. This important work of natural philosophy is the mature development of Mr. Darwin's theory, propounded in his essay on "The Origin of Species," and, if that theory were established, would certainly be regarded in future as his greatest performance in scientific investigation and disquisition. We are disposed, however, to believe that a higher value will ultimately be attached to his book on "The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication," for the sake of its very interesting and instructive display of the results of experimental observation, even should the hypothesis of a gradual transformation from the lowest to the highest forms of vital organisation be given up. It cannot be denied, in that case, by any student hereafter of the sciences of zoology, botany, and physiology, that they have been materially advanced by these endeavours to prove and illustrate an assumed principle of nature, or mode of creation, which has obtained the serious consideration of many learned men. In the present instance, Mr. Darwin's aim, in the first part of this book, is to show the grounds for his belief that the human race is derived from an inferior animal species; that the physical, intellectual, and moral qualities of man could be developed from the brute through the operation of such laws of growth and generation as Mr. Darwin has explained; and that some approach may be made to finding the ancestry of our kind, and of other mammals, in an extinct group of marine animals "resembling the larvæ of existing Ascidiæ." He finds the nearest kindred to mankind in the Catarhine apes, a group of Simiadae taking this name from the structure of their nostrils, found now in Africa and Asia, but which existed in Europe during the Upper Miocene geological period: the gorilla and the chimpanzee are living examples. We are not inclined to accept this genealogy without evidence much more convincing than Mr. Darwin has adduced; but the ingenuity of his arguments, and the eloquence with which he dignifies a proposition not very flattering to human pride, will be admired by the dispassionate reader. A chapter discussing the extent and probable origin of the different varieties or so-called races of mankind is the last section of Part I., and leads to the subject of Part II., "Sexual Selection;" inasmuch as to the agency of this cause mainly does the author now seem disposed to look for the origin of some of the greatest differences of race in man and in other animals. This subject occupies nearly the latter half of his first volume and the whole of his second, with respect to which let us repeat what has been said of his treatise on "Variation under Domestication," that his statements of facts and his comments upon them, as an eminent naturalist who has collected a vast amount of knowledge bearing on these points, must have a great permanent value, apart from his theory of the origin of races. He considers, in general, that the peculiar qualities which enable males either to conquer other males or to attract the notice and preference of females are likely to be continued in a future generation, there being usually no great disproportion in numbers between the sexes. This is a most interesting topic, with a flavour of romantic sentiment, by the analogy with human social and domestic affairs, which may be fascinating to some who do not usually care for studies of natural science. The more fastidious minds will perhaps be less enchanted when they contemplate the implied suggestion that all the splendour and prowess of a gallant knight in chivalry, so far as its inspiration depends on the noble service of a lady, may have its counterpart in the brilliant plumage and sharp beak or claws of a cock bird fighting all his rivals and crowing in triumph to invite the attention of a hen. There is certainly a good chance, if the birds settle these matters so decisively amongst themselves, that the hen's eggs will hereafter produce chickens of a gaudy feather, and destined to fight victoriously with the weapons inherited from their sires. It is possible that the same causes may produce an accumulated effect in several following generations; and the showy aspect, the sonorous or melodious voice, and the means of offence or defence, which have given the offspring of aristocratic parentage a command, so to speak, of the matrimonial market, may at length become the most characteristic features of the race. This is, as we understand it, the doctrine of sexual selection, the plausibility of which, applied to many kinds of animals, and perhaps to man in certain conditions of savage life, may be readily admitted without believing it capable of accounting for the existence of distinct species. Mr. Darwin's contributions to natural history, great as they were before, have been substantially increased, and his reputation must be enhanced by his investigation of the subject referred to. It is scarcely needful to remark, but for the jesting turn of a sentence above, that he treats worthily and seriously, as becomes a philosopher, of the moral conditions of human life, wherever he has occasion to speak of them. His two chapters on the "Secondary Sexual Characters of Man," however inconclusive they may appear with reference to his theory of modification by sexual selection, contain many interesting anecdotes of the habits and tastes of savage nations. The primeval or pre-historic phases of the great beard question, which is not yet practically settled in English society, are explored with much sagacity, and the author forms a conjecture likely to be approved by some advocates of modern fashions. "It appears that our male ape-like progenitors acquired their beards as an ornament to charm or excite the opposite sex, and transmitted them to man as he now exists." Yet with regard to the hairy covering of the rest of the body in apes, Mr. Darwin accounts for its disappearance in mankind by supposing that "the females were first denuded of hair in like manner as a sexual ornament, but they transmitted this character almost equally to both sexes." Upon the whole, this very clever and learned treatise appears to us far from convincing; but it is an entertaining book, and not unedifying to thoughtful students.